

25 February 2021

An Open Letter to Iranian Authorities on Recent Farm Seizures

Chief Justice Ebrahim Raisi and acting Minister of Agriculture Abbas Keshavarz,

We are a group of persons involved professionally in the global food and agriculture system and international development. We are concerned about the plight of smallholder farmers throughout the world who often face injustice from arbitrary authority. Consequently, we are alarmed to learn of a new stage in the ongoing persecution of Iran's Bahá'í minority involving the confiscation of farmlands in the village of Ivel.

We understand that, in late 2020, two Iranian courts issued orders that declared ownership of lands by 27 Bahá'ís in Ivel to be illegal. The judges responsible for the decisions against the Bahá'ís of Ivel are Mr. Mohammad Sadegh Savadkouhi and Mr. Hassan Babai. The court documents indicate that the confiscation of their land is due to the owners' religious beliefs.

These decisions followed decades of persecution against the Bahá'ís of Ivel, who are hard-working, low-income agricultural workers with no other assets and means of earning a livelihood aside from their homes and farmlands.

These recent land seizures take place within the context of escalating raids on Bahá'í-owned homes and businesses in Iran. On 22 November 2020, over a hundred government agents raided the shops and homes of dozens of Bahá'ís in seven cities and demanded that they hand over their property deeds.

We understand that Bahá'í families have farmed land in Ivel for over 150 years and that these families have been constructive members of the local community, by, for instance, starting a school for children of all faiths and by carrying out measures to improve the hygiene and health of all community members. Despite their contributions to the community, they have faced a series of persecutions throughout the years, characterized by mass expulsion and displacement, and the demolition, bulldozing and confiscation of their homes.

Despite these persecutions, the Bahá'í farmers were at least able to continue working their land. Now, the recent court decision means their farmland will be seized. Clearly, these and other confiscations of Bahá'í properties in Iran are part of an organized persecution based solely on religion.

We write as fellow agriculturists to bring attention to this instance of persecution and urge the Iranian authorities to overturn their decision with regard to the farmers of Ivel.

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